

“I don’t know exactly when I started feeling this anxiousness, but it’s definitely getting better, especially with your help and guidance.”

Phoebe’s monotone words were echoing through Dr. Bridgers’s speakers, back into the microphone, so that she could hear every word she said. Her palms were slick with sweat, as if she had just touched a cold glass with condensation built upon its surface. Her nervous smile and self-comforting mannerisms had all but fooled the therapist. It is clear and plain to see that she is lying through her slightly crooked teeth. Dr. Bridgers decided not to confront her about it.

“Well, I’m glad that I am helping you through this, agoraphobia is much more common than you may think. It’s just that most cases aren’t as severe as yours,” replies Dr. Bridgers.

"My narcolepsy has been acting up again as well, and sometimes I-" Phoebe falters, "well I just end up dozing off without even realizing it," Phoebe remarks.

"We'll prescribe you some stimulants to help you with that," Dr. Bridgers assures her.

Phoebe nods her head, and Dr. Bridgers smiles at her.

“Thank you for meeting with me today,” says Dr. Bridgers

“Yeah,” Phoebe mutters, “I’ll see you tomorrow, goodbye.”

Phoebe quickly closes the laptop, leaving a damp handprint. She walks over to one of the cabinets in her cluttered kitchen and pulls out a pill bottle that reads “Klonopin: 2 mg”. She presses down on the lid and twists it off, shaking two white tablets into her hand. Her coughs rattle her body as she opens another cabinet and pulls out a glass cup, filling it with water. She tosses the pills into her mouth and swallows.

Phoebe’s skin is pale as a bedsheet and her pupils are like black holes. She hadn’t left her house since she interviewed for her remote job 8 months ago. Working as a Web designer for a

large company has her interaction with people at a minimum. She gets an email on what the client wants their webpage to look like, and she designs it for them. Simple as that. All of her curtains are always drawn, leaving her in a perpetual darkness, from morning to morning.

Phoebe goes back into her living room, pulls out her phone. Her screen lights up and shows that the time was 7:31 PM. She swipes through her phone as she orders takeout. In the special instructions, she writes “LEAVE AT DOOR.” She turns her attention to her bedroom, where she lays in bed until she jumps at a pounding on the door. After jumping out of bed and locking her bedroom door, She calls out,

“Go away!”

As she backs away from the door, the pounding gets louder. It sounds as if the banging is echoing in her head, bouncing off her skull, getting louder and louder. Phoebe screams,

“Please, STOP!”

The hammering stops. She hears jiggling from the door handle as the door unlocks. Someone twists the handle and gives the door a slight push as she powerlessly cowers in the corner watching the door slowly creak open.

Phoebe's eyes flutter open as her cell phone rings. She doesn't pick up the phone, watching and waiting as the clock on the screen ticks over from 8:12 PM until it stops ringing. Shortly after the call ends, her phone chimes with a message that her food had been delivered. She tiptoes to the window looking out at her driveway and watches as a car's headlights turn out into the road. Phoebe turns toward the door and slowly opens it, peering out with one eye. She scans her front porch and sees her food on the ground in front of the door. She closes it again and releases the chain lock on the door and cracks it open just enough to grab the brown paper bag and pull it in, slamming the door shut and replacing the chain lock behind her.

Phoebe takes the bag to her kitchen table and pulls out all the food. When she flicks on the switch to her kitchen light, she sees a figure in the corner of her eye. Her heart skips a beat at the sight, but when she looks, the figure is no longer there. She quickly packs her food back up and takes it into her room, locking the door behind her. She sits in her bed, eating her takeout and watching the television until she hears glass break outside her door. Without missing a beat, she snatches the remote and turns off the television. The room goes dark as she sees the crack underneath her door glow white from a light outside. Someone's footsteps can be clearly heard outside, thumping on the hardwood floor. The sound of boots fades away into the distance as Phoebe's heart starts pounding and her hands start sweating. Her body is shivering, despite being underneath her bedsheets. She squeezes her eyes shut as the room starts spinning around her, her bated breaths growing shallower and quicker. Through the thumping of her heart, she hears the jiggling of her door handle.

Phoebe shoots up out of bed in a panic, as the morning sun glints through her window's curtains. Her bedsheets are bunched up around her, leaving the edges of her queen-sized bed barren. She tosses the sheets off her body and rolls out of bed. She sees the silhouette of her body in the bed and reaches her hand out to touch the shadow. As her hand comes away slick with sweat, she pulls all her sheets off the bed and takes them to the washing machine. She lifts the top of the machine and dumps them in, along with a capful of washing detergent. As she walks back to her bedroom, she taps her phone screen, setting an hour timer and ordering takeout.

Phoebe opens her laptop and takes it into the kitchen, almost tripping over a trashbag. She scrolls through her emails as she fills a coffee pot with water and pours it into the coffee maker. After opening the cupboard and pulling out coffee filters and a bag of ground coffee beans, she opens a lid on the coffee maker and places a filter inside, filled with coffee grounds.

After pushing a few buttons on the machine, a whirring sound emanates from the heating coils, and after a few minutes, the sound of coffee hitting the bottom of the pot can be heard. She takes her laptop and places it on the table in front of her couch in the living room. As Phoebe scrolls through her emails once more, her phone rings, and she waits for it to stop, watching the phone icon dance on the screen. A few seconds after the phone stops ringing, a ding rings out, showing that her food had arrived. She looks out the window again, and watches the car disappear around the corner. Her palms get sweaty as she peeks through the door again. The plastic bag crinkles as she brings it inside and sets it on the dining table. She unties the knots in the bag and pulls her food out. The food that was delivered was not what she had ordered. In a fit of rage, she slings the food across the room watching it smash against the kitchen cabinets.

Phoebe storms over to her laptop and opens her video chat application. Dr. Bridgers had messaged her earlier in the day to ask if she would be appearing for her session. She replied in the affirmative, trying to sound as enthusiastic as possible, although it was clear she wasn't fooling anyone. Moments later Dr. Bridger's face appeared on the screen.

"Hello again, Phoebe, how are you feeling? Are you still fine with your medication?" inquires Dr. Bridgers.

"Everything's all great. No side effects yet," Phoebe replies monotonously.